

Last week we learned from chapter 25, that Paul was summoned before Festus (the Roman Governor) and Agrippa (the King of Israel). What we have in chapter 26 is Paul's defense before Agrippa (vv1-23), and Paul's interaction with Agrippa (vv24-32). It's my intention this morning, to limit our consideration to vv1-18, which can be divided into five parts: his life as a Pharisee (vv1-5), his belief in a resurrection (vv6-8), his persecution of Christians (vv9-11), his conversion to Christ (vv12-15), and his commission by Christ (vv16-18).

I. His Life as a Pharisee (vv1-5)

1. V1—"Then Agrippa said to Paul, You are permitted to speak for yourself. So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself."
2. Beginning with v2, Paul provides his defense by largely recounting his personal testimony (as he's done on earlier occasions).
3. He prefaces this with a direct statement to Agrippa, which expressed his gladness in giving his defense.
4. This was especially so, because v3—"you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews."
5. As Agrippa was Jewish, he had a rather extensive knowledge of the law and customs of the Jewish nation.
6. V4—"My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know."
7. V5—"They knew men from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."
8. If you remember, of the various groups or parties within the Jews, the Pharisees were the strictest (in belief and practice).
9. Thus, Paul begins his defense by reminding Agrippa that he was born, raised, and lived as a good Jew.

II. His Belief in a Resurrection (vv6-8)

1. Having described his upbringing and life as a Pharisee, Paul now describes the fundamental reason he was being accused.
2. V6—"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers"—there's been some debate as to what Paul meant by "the promise."
3. That this includes the future bodily resurrection is evident from v8, but I think it includes the promise of Christ.
4. God promised to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), that the Messiah would come and secure salvation that culminated in the resurrection and eternal life.
5. V7—"To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain"—that is, from the beginning, Israel lived in light of this promise.
6. The Jewish Saints within the OT had the basic hope that the Messiah would come and bring eternal life.

7. It's true that most of the Jews in the first century had refused to believe that Christ fulfilled with promise.
8. And tragically, they "earnestly served God night and day" in hopes to achieve the promise of salvation.
9. Simon Kistemaker—"Hope refers to the promise that God made to Israel's spiritual forefathers through the prophets in the OT era. And God fulfilled this purpose in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The refusal of Paul's opponents to recognize the fulfillment of Israel's hope causes the apostle to proclaim and teach even more earnestly the actuality of this hope."
10. V7b—"For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews"—that is, he was blamed for believing something the fathers believed.
11. Paul's hope was one and the same with the fathers—he hoped to have eternal life for the sake of Christ.
12. V8—"Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead"—both the Gentiles and many of the Jews (the Sadducees) rejected a bodily resurrection.
13. But this unbelief runs contrary to the hope of the fathers, who, through the OT, had the hope of the resurrection.
14. Dear brethren, if we are going to live past the grave, then of necessity, there must be a bodily resurrection.
15. Matt.22:29—"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures not the power of God"—the OT Scripture foretold the resurrection.
16. Acts 26:22-23—"Therefore, having obtained help from God to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."
17. Notice two things: first, Paul taught that which was revealed in the OT Scriptures (he merely rightly understood the prophets and Moses); second, the promise of our resurrection is tied to Christ's resurrection ('that He would be the first to rise from the dead').

III. His Persecution of Christians (vv9-11)

1. Here Paul recounts the sad and humbling truth, that prior to becoming a Christian he persecuted Christians.
2. V9—"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"—he originally disbelieved that Christ was the Messiah and he persecuted the followers of Christ.
3. V10—"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them."
4. V11—"And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."
5. He "compelled them to blaspheme" as he forced them to recant their views by the threat of punishment.
6. Most Christians would refuse to recant their views, and would suffer beatings, prison, and death instead.

7. Let me simply suggest in passing, that Paul recounts this part of his past for two reasons: first, to humble Him; and second, to exalt the free grace and power of God.
8. In other words, Paul did nothing to deserve salvation; he actually only deserved damnation (as we all do).
9. Furthermore, this is how depraved he was—he not only disbelieved the Christian faith but sought to destroy it.

IV. His Conversion to Christ (vv12-15)

1. V12—"While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests."
2. Paul is now going to describe his Damascus experience, wherein Christ arrested him and humbled him.
3. (1) A light, v13—"at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me."
4. This seems to have been a literal light that everyone saw, and that outshined the sun (at its midday strength).
5. We know from other accounts that Paul was blinded as a result of this light (22:11), and led into Damascus.
6. (2) A question, v14—"And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'"
7. While everyone saw the light, only Paul heard the voice by which our Savior confronted Paul as persecuting Him (as He is one with His people, to persecute the body is to persecute the Head).
8. V14b—"It is hard for you to kick against the goads"—this expression is taken from animals who fight against the goads of its master."
9. John Gill—"It is a proverbial expression, taken from beasts that are goaded, who kick against the goads or pricks, and hurt themselves the more thereby."
10. It's as if Christ says—"Saul, to fight against My people, is to fight against Me, and to fight against Me, is a losing battle."
11. (3) A revelation, v15—"So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"
12. It's here that Christ made a personal revelation of Himself to Paul—it was true—Jesus of Nazareth was alive.

V. His Commission by Christ (vv16-18)

1. Having recounted his conversion to Christ, he now recounts his commission by Christ (it was gracious, specific, and urgent).
2. (1) It was gracious, v16—"But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you."
3. Christ personally appeared to Paul to make him a minister and a witness (Paul wasn't able to make himself a minister or witness).

4. Paul would become a witness of two things—the things which you have seen and the things I will reveal to you.
5. By "the things which you have seen" is meant what he witnessed on the way to Damascus (and re-told in vv12-15).
6. By "the things I will reveal to you" is meant all that Christ revealed to him those several years in the desert.
7. If you remember, Paul tells us in Galatians 1:17, that after his conversion he spent time alone in Arabia.
8. (2) It was specific, v17—"I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you."
9. Here our Savior foretells opposition from the Jews and Gentiles and yet also promises him deliverance.
10. And of course, as we have seen, all of these came true as he was hated both by the Jews and Gentiles.
11. Our Savior then commissioned him as an apostle to the Gentiles—"to whom (the Gentiles) I now send you."
12. The Greek word for "send" is *apostello* from which we get the word "apostle" which means "to send."
13. While would minister to Jews in almost every city, he would be sent to take the gospel into the world.
14. And as we have seen over the past several months, he's taken the gospel all over the known world (and will eventually arrive at Rome itself).
15. (3) It was urgent, v18—"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."
16. Our Savior doesn't mean Paul had the ability or power to open the eyes of sinners and turn them from darkness to light.
17. Because salvation is through the means of the preaching of the word, the preacher is described in this way.
18. He was sent to "open blind eyes" as he was sent to preach the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation.
19. He was sent into the darkness of paganism, to proclaim the matchless grace of God in the gospel of Christ.
20. And so, in the time we have remaining, I want to examine v18 in a more theological sense by 5 observations.
21. I suggest that within v18, we have one of the fullest and yet concise statements on the order of salvation.
22. That is, the way in which God ordinarily saves a sinner—how the redemption purchased by Christ is applied (let me say a few words about v18 as a whole).
23. (a) It describes the ordinary way God brings sinners to himself—this is true for Jews and for Gentiles; (b) It's taken from many OT texts especially Isaiah 42:5-9 (this refers to Christ who accomplishes these things through His people); (c) It's a summary of what Paul would write in his letters (Col.1:12-14).

24. Observation 1—Regeneration comes before conversion—regeneration is the first thing that happens in salvation.
25. Because man by nature is in darkness he needs light to penetrate that darkness and reveal to him the truth.
26. All men by nature are born spiritually blind—they are blind to the truth of their need and God's provision.
27. All men, by nature, are under the blinding influence of Satan, and are unable and unwilling to see the truth.
28. Thus, what man needs is a sovereign and powerful work of God to infuse light into our darkened hearts.
29. This is why He sends the gospel into this dark world, that those who sit in darkness will see a great light (Matt.4:16).
30. 2Cor.4:3-6—"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded...For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
31. Observation 2—Conversion entails repentance and faith—conversion refers to the change that follows regeneration (1Thess.1:9-10).
32. It fundamentally refers to a change of direction and allegiance—we turn from darkness to light, from Satan to God.
33. No sooner does God the Holy Spirit shine light into our dark souls, we then see our need and see His provision.
34. (a) We turn from darkness to light—Scripture uses the concepts of darkness and light as moral realms.
35. By nature we are in darkness—this means our minds and hearts are filled with ignorance and wickedness.
36. By grace we turn from darkness to light—that is, we come to Scripture which reveals to us the truth.
37. (b) We turn from the power of Satan to God—by nature we are under the power or dominion of Satan.
38. Here our Savior speaks of two kingdoms—there's the kingdom of darkness ruled over by Satan and there's the kingdom of light ruled over by God (in Christ).
39. Now, it's important to understand that Satan's dominion over the kingdom of darkness has been given him by God as a judgment upon man.
40. Furthermore, remember what we learned last week—we mustn't confuse these two kingdoms with what I described as earthly and heavenly nations.
41. Let me also clarify, turning from darkness and the power of Satan doesn't mean you first stop sinning before you come to Christ.
42. Turning from darkness and Satan means you recognize who are in darkness and under the power of Satan (this is why you are turning to the light and to God in Christ).
43. Observation 3—Justification is obtained by faith alone—justification entails forgiveness and acceptance.

44. Thus, no sooner does a sinner turn from Satan to God (in Christ), does he receive the forgiveness of sins (forgiveness is the negative whereas acceptance is the positive).
45. Observation 4—All Christians have a single inheritance—every justified person receives an inheritance.
46. And there is only one inheritance for all of God's people—this is the promise that Paul spoke about in v7.
47. The Greek word rendered "inheritance" (KJV, NKJV, NASB), and "place" (ESV) literally refers to "a lot."
48. It refers to a person's place of dwelling or inheritance—it here refers to their place among God's people.
49. The Gentiles by nature were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers of the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world.
50. But all of this would change when they were converted, because they would share in the commonwealth of Israel and partake of the promise of the covenants, having hoping of the resurrection and eternal life.
51. This means, the inheritance that believing Gentiles would have is one and the same with believing Jews.
52. And what is this inheritance but a place with the promise land of the new heavens and new earth; thus this inheritance is a present reality (believing Gentiles presently have a place among the people of God).
53. Observation 5—Sanctification results from faith in Christ—here we find the object of true and saving faith.
54. We are justified and sanctified by in Him—we become Christians by faith and live as Christians by faith.
55. But what does it mean to be "sanctified by faith in Christ"—well, if you remember our recent SS lessons.
56. Sanctification refers to the work of God is setting us apart from sin and this world to Him and holiness.
57. It takes place in two stages—there is initial sanctification that takes place when we become Christians.
58. The Holy Spirit takes up residency within us, delivering us from sin as a master (crucifying the flesh with its passions and lusts).
59. And then, He enables us gradually walk in humble obedience to the law of God out of love and gratitude.
60. How is this done but by faith in Christ—we live by faith, walk by faith, and work by faith (in Christ).
61. (a) Dear Christian, all this is presently (and permanently) true of you; (b) dear sinner, all this is potentially true of you (Jew or Gentile, male or female, boy or girl, slave or free).